

March 30, 2012

Chairman Julius Genachowski
Commissioner Robert McDowell
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St., SW
Washington, DC 20554-0004

Re: Big Bend Telephone Company Petition for Waiver, WC Docket No. 10-90, GN Docket No. 09-51, WC Docket No. 07-135, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 01-92, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109, WT Docket No. 10-208

Dear Mr. Chairman and Commissioners:

I am writing to urge you to support the Big Bend Telephone Company's urgent request for a waiver to certain federal universal service and intercarrier compensation rules, as described in the above-referenced proceedings. Big Bend Telephone provides critical voice and broadband Internet service to a 17,000 square-mile region of West Texas that includes numerous federal installations.

Big Bend Telephone has served the Big Bend region since the 1960s, offering continually improving services in an extremely difficult environment. The company serves a remote and rugged desert area with county population densities as low as 0.4 persons per square mile. Big Bend Telephone's services are literally the only connection that many residents of eight Texas counties have with the outside world. If the waiver is not granted, the company may cease to operate and *these vital lifelines will be cut off*.

Fourteen school districts, eight libraries, six medical facilities, two state detention centers and two institutions of higher education all depend on Big Bend Telephone, as do city and county governments and the area's banks. All of them offer critical services that *will* be disrupted without the waiver.

The impact of this disruption, moreover, can affect the entire Texas economy. A recent Hudson Institute study found that only one-third of the economic activity generated by rural telecommunications stays in the immediate area, with the remaining two-thirds benefitting urban areas. The same study indicates the split is closer to \$4 in urban impact for every \$1 of rural benefit in Texas.

There are vital *national* interests at stake as well. Big Bend Telephone's service area includes substantial oil and gas production that relies on the company's services. It also covers a quarter of the nation's border with Mexico. Federal installations that depend on the company for voice and data communications include multiple border crossings and Homeland Security facilities as well as the Federal Aviation Administration, a Department of Defense balloon surveillance station and Big Bend National Park, the nation's most isolated park.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the Big Bend Telephone Company to the residents and institutions of West Texas. I urge you to approve the requested waiver to ensure that our citizens remain assured of uninterrupted service.

Sincerely,



Susan Combs

